

My name is Kristin Allen, a resident of Durham Ct. As the president of the IDA Ct, a former special education teacher of 15 years, current literacy specialist of RSD13 and Certified Dyslexia Practitioner and Trainer, I am committed to ensuring that all students in Ct are given the right to read and I fully believe House Bill 6517 would progress us toward this goal.

Due to the fact that I have had 16 years of experience working in the public school system, I have been able to observe first hand, a system that is unfortunately failing many students. With that said, this crisis is in no way the fault of our hard working, dedicated professionals. Rather, it is a result of lack of awareness and understanding on how to truly teach our students how to read and write. The good news is, we have the ability to put a solution in place to resolve this issue, by passing House Bill 6517.

The best way that I can demonstrate how vital the passing of this bill is, is to provide an example. Below details the journey, that I have observed first hand, countless students in our system experience:

Meet Johnny, a happy go-lucky Kindergartner. He lives with his mom, dad, older sister and pet dog Cooper. Prior to attending Kindergarten, Johnny was at a play-based preschool for 2 years. When Johnny entered Kindergarten, he knew how to sing his alphabet (except for that darn Imno part which his parents thought was cute), could write most of his name using uppercase letters (although didn't know how to hold a pencil properly) and needed to learn how to sit in a circle for more than 5 minutes. Luckily, he had a very nurturing and engaging teacher who was committed to teach her class of 16 students the daily routines and basic skills needed to progress. Within the first two weeks of school, the district gave their universal screeners and Johnny came out red in most areas on the DIBELS. The teacher contributed this to the fact that Johnny wasn't exposed to this content in preschool, but again, was dedicated to get Johnny to progress. Everyday Johnny would learn foundational literacy skills during a word work block. The teacher would read from her manual and go through the steps to teach Johnny his lowercase letters. Johnny made some progress but kept confusing the same letters over and over again, b, d, g, j, f, t, c, s. He also was having difficulty forming letters properly and although accurate on the other letter names and sounds, did not know them with automaticity. Johnny's teacher commented that a lot of her students were experiencing the same difficulty, but felt that in time, these skills would develop. Plus, she needed to move on because she was already two days behind the curriculum pacing guide and needed to catch up. After word work time, Johnny had Reader's Workshop! He loved listening to his teacher read from a book! Today his teacher was teaching the students that if they came to a word they didn't know how to read, they could use the pictures! This was called Picture Power! Johnny thought this was the coolest. As soon as his teacher said "off you go readers!", Johnny found a cozy spot on the rug and began "reading" from his book bag. He looked at the pictures on every page just like his teacher taught him, pretended to point to the words on the pages and thus felt successful as a reader! His teacher pulled him to her circle table and had him read to her. He pointed to the first word, which his teacher taught him as a sight word. "A..." He pointed to the second word. He looked up at his teacher. She told him what the word was, "big". He pointed to the word "big" and went back, looked at the picture again and read "A big house". Johnny's teacher smiled so he knew he was right. He moved onto the second page and began to recognize the pattern, "A big truck." This time, Johnny's teacher said, "Lets try this again. Take a look at the picture, what else could this be?" Hmm, Johnny was confused. He looked up, "Car?" he asked, (even though to him the picture looked more like a truck). "Yes, that is correct". Johnny reread the page, "A big car." This carried on and Johnny read most of the word correctly based on the picture, although he read airplane for plane but his teacher gave him that one because "it was tricky". Next came writing time! Johnny loved Writers Workshop! He loved to sketch across the pages! When it came time to actually write though, he struggled to tap out the words and his teacher would often have to remind him to check the "word wall" to help. His teacher noted that several of Johnny's letters were reversed but again, thought this would come in time. Eventually midyear universal screeners were given and Johnny made some progress, especially when it came to his sight words, but he

was still red and yellow on his letter names, sounds and phonemic segmentation on DIBELS. His F&P score was also in the red. By the end of the year he was supposed to be at a D but was only an A. At his parent teacher conference, Johnny's parents were confused. His sister didn't seem to have these difficulties, and they read to him every night and practiced the sight words his teacher sent him, just like they did with their daughter. Johnny's teacher said she would send a book bag home with him that included leveled text and they could encourage Johnny to read to them, so that is just what they did. By the end of the year Johnny was still in the red on letter naming, sounds and phonemic segmentation fluency on DIBELS. He still confused the letters b and d as well as g and j when identifying their names and sound as well as when writing them. However, he was now at a F& P Level C, which was only one level below benchmark and knew all of the kindergarten sight words. Johnny's teacher was proud of his progress and wished him well in first grade.

Upon finding out who Johnny's first grade teacher was, his parents were so excited that he got who other parents considered the best teacher in the grade! She was patient, creative and would often bring work home with her at night and on the weekends. Johnny transitioned well into first grade and was loving it! His favorite subjects were lunch, recess, gym and math. He didn't like reading and writing as much but they were ok in his opinion. After the first round of benchmark assessments were given, Johnny's teacher became slightly concerned. His F&P scores regressed to a B and he was still red and yellow on his letter names, sound and phonemic segmentation on DIBELS. His i-Ready (a computer based assessment) scores were also in the yellow, with phonemic awareness and phonics being the primary areas of concern. When she brought this up to the interventionists, they expressed that she needed to start a Tier 1 plan and document strategies for 6 weeks. Being the dedicated teacher she was, that's exactly what she did. Every week, she would meet with Johnny in a small group and work on his reading of leveled text. Johnny quickly realized he couldn't rely on the pictures or pattern of the text to help him anymore but his teacher told him he could use another strategy, which was to look at the first letter of the words he was unsure of and make a guess. Johnny began using this strategy and was accurate for at least 75% of the words. Johnny also had an extremely difficult time in word work and his unit scores were often below the expected 80%. He still reversed b and d so his teacher taught him how to "make his bed" (a go to when it comes to b/d reversals). During writing time Johnny often spent most of his time sketching across the pages. When his teacher asked him what Johnny wanted to write, he would dictate it to her and she would write it on a sticky note for him to copy. After 6 weeks of Tier 1 instruction, Johnny's F&P was at a Level D! His teacher and the interventionists felt that since he was making progress, Tier 1 support could continue. That was until the mid year benchmarks. Johnny demonstrated growth on his F&P but his DIBELS and i-Ready scores went down. At this point, Johnny was brought up to the SAT (student assistance team) where it was decided he would be given Tier 2 reading support. The interventionists would meet with Johnny 2x a week for 30 min to work on skills. The interventionist would use those same leveled texts that his teacher was using and encourage Johnny to use his knowledge of sight words as well as sound out the words he was unsure of, which proved to be challenging for Johnny. During SATs she would report that he was making progress but kept confusing b and d as well as short vowel sounds. When he came to a word he didn't know, the interventionist noted he would often guess at the word by looking at the pictures or first letter of the word. Johnny stayed in Tier 2 intervention for the remainder of first grade. His DIBELS and i-Ready scores demonstrated a small amount of progress but his F&P scores were only slightly below grade level.

Johnny entered second grade not feeling as great about school as he had done in the past. To make a long story short, Johnny continued to struggle in the areas of reading and writing. His F&P scores were now in the red, since DIBELS wasn't conducted past first grade the fact that he never made it out of red/yellow on those scores was a moot point and his F&P scores had flatlined. Johnny was moved to Tier 3 intervention by the middle of the year and referred for special education by the end of the year, where he qualified to receive special education support. Johnny still loved recess, lunch and gym. Math wasn't that bad except for when he had to read word problems or do math fact fluency, although he continued to make his 3 and 6 backwards, which frustrated him! He liked science and social studies although those weren't taught everyday and he didn't like when he had to read or write anything during those times. He was taken out of word work time (30 min/day) by his special education teacher who saw him in a group of 5 kids where they worked on some

phonics, although didn't get much done by the time it took the teacher to settle the group down. Johnny hated Readers Workshop because his friends teased him for having to read "baby books" from the leveled bins, so he often faked reading during that entire time. During Writers Workshop, Johnny often asked to use the bathroom, came back and sharpened his pencil and then attempted to put a few words on a page before a paraprofessional came in to work with him, often asking him to read what he wrote because she couldn't read it and then gave him support by writing words on a sticky note for him to copy.

While I can go in great depth about what happened to Jonny past second grade, the summary is that he continued to receive special education services through high school. He made limited progress in the areas of reading and writing and continued to be several years below grade level. He ended up resenting school because he felt that the system was failing him, often got into trouble with his friends and experienced constant feelings of hopelessness and self-doubt. Although he continued to receive support from his parents and school based team Johnny to feel lost in terms of his future contributions to society.

Despite its best efforts, the school system did not meet Johnny's academic or emotional needs. While Johnny may find success in life, this sadly isn't the case for many students. In fact, some students don't have supportive parents like Johnny. Some students don't have word work blocks built into their day, where they are exposed to foundational skills. Some students aren't identified as early as 2nd grade to receive special education services because there aren't proper universal screeners or SRBI systems in place. Some students act out more defiantly and aggressively due to academic difficulties than Johnny did and end up with a misdiagnosis as Emotionally Disturbed, being placed in a self contained or outplaced situation. Some students turn to drugs or alcohol. Some students do not graduate and thus are not able to attend postsecondary education. Sadly, some students choose to commit suicide. Unfortunately, statistics are showing that the percentages of students in this "some" category are only increasing year over year.

We, as a state, have the obligation to change this journey for many students, if not **ALL** students. By passing House Bill 6517, we can make it so that early intervention and identification processes are put into place, starting in preschool. We can ensure that all educators (regular education, interventionists, special education teachers) have the knowledge and expertise to teach students how to read and write versus using improper strategies such as picture power, guessing a word based on the first letter or skipping the word entirely. We can ensure that if students are identified as needing intervention or specialized instruction that they get the necessary support required to graduate high school and feel prepared and confident to attain their life goals. If we as a state want to raise children to be self-driven, lifelong learners I ask you, why would we not pass House Bill 6517 ?

Sincerely,

Kristin Allen

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better"